

Story 2028 (Transcribed from tape of Atatürk İlkokulu) Narrator: Sabriye Eydemir, 10

Location: Karacabey, kaza town of Bursa Province

Date: Spring 1966

A Boy, His Grandmother, and the Of-f-f¹ Jinn²

Once there was and once there wasn't a boy and his grandmother. They were very poor, but when the boy became old enough to work, he and his grandmother set out to find a job for him. After they had walked for a long time, they grew tired and sat down beneath a tree in the shade to rest. As she sat down, the grandmother said, "Of-f-f!"

¹The name of this jinn is Of or Of-f-f. He is often summoned accidentally by people who do not want him and often do not even know about him. When someone is exhausted or discouraged, he/she exhales audibly with a sound rendered "Of-f-f!" When he hears what he thinks is his name being exclaimed, that jinn responds (as do some other jinns) to see what the summoner wants.

²The word jinn suggests two very different kinds of supernatural creatures. The first is the huge being who comes forth from a bottle or from just nowhere in response to some signal, such as the rubbing of a magic lamp or magic ring. This creature then proceeds to give the caller supernatural or magical aid to achieve whatever he /she wishes. The other kind of jinn is almost never seen. It is a spiritual force referred to in some Sufi beliefs and in other mystical systems.

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An Arab³ appeared immediately and asked her, "What do you want? Where are you going?"

The grandmother answered, "I set out looking for a job for my grandson, but I became tired and sat down here to rest.

"I can find a job for him. Come back here and get your boy after a week has passed. Sit beneath this same tree and upon the same stone and say, 'Of-f-f.'" He then departed with the grandson.

At his home the Arab tried to teach the boy a special trade, but the boy did not seem to understand a single thing he said. He pretended that he was confused by everything that the Arab was explaining to him. When the Arab's own son looked through a window and saw the old lady's grandson, he asked, "Alas! How did you happen to fall beneath the power of my father?"

One day the Arab was trying to teach his pupil the craft of a magician. When he realized that his pupil showed no signs of understanding what he was saying, the Arab

³In Turkish tales the jinns which are summoned by rubbing or licking a magic object or by uttering a code word are often pictured as Arabs.

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called his son and said, "Bring me a sharp knife so I can kill this boy." But the son went and hid all the knives in the house and then reported to his father he could not find a knife. The Arab then said to his son, "Come and hold this boy while I search for one

While the Arab was gone, his son said to the young stranger, "What are you waiting here for? My father eats all of the boys who come here." The pupil fled, and since a week had passed, he went to the place where he had left his grandmother

"My grandson, did you learn anything?" the old lady asked.

"I pretended that I learned nothing for fear that the Arab would be jealous of my knowledge and would kill me. But I learned much and then escaped the evil creature."

Just then some horse traders came along, leading a string of horses behind them. The boy said, "Grandmother, I shall now turn myself into a horse. Sell me to these horse dealers for a good price, but do not let them have my halter."⁴ The old woman sold him for 10,000 liras. The

⁴In folktales there is a wide range of what have sometimes been called life tokens. Talismans and amulets are often very much more than simply good-luck charms, for they may be integrally related to the physical condition or even the life itself of a human being or other creature. Some life tokens

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new horse started moving ahead of the rest of the pack, and when it went around a corner, it shook itself turned into a boy again.

The merchant who had bought the horse for a high price asked one of his workers, "Where is that new horse?"

"I have not seen him since we continued on our way," answered the worker.

The boy returned to his grandmother, who was proud of him now. As they sat talking, a hunter approached. The boy said, "Grandmother, I shall now turn myself into a dog. Sell me to that hunter who is coming toward us." After the old woman had done this, the new dog began catching all of the small animals and birds that were on the ground.

are separable souls hidden in some secret places--a box, the stomach of a deer, the stomach of a fish--in order to protect the lives of their owners. If you can find the separable soul and destroy it, you thereby kill its owner. Sometimes, on the other hand, the life token must be kept in the possession of its owner. If it is taken away, the owner may lose consciousness or be changed into some other form. Sometimes a life token is a gauge of a person's condition and is watched closely by its owner's friends or relatives in order to keep posted on the welfare of the owner. It may be a gem which changes color if its owner is in serious trouble; it may be a knife which turns rusty for the same reason. The halter in this tale is apparently similar to a life token, though the owner manages to survive even after he loses it temporarily. The child narrator here does not make explicit the dynamics of this convention.

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It soon shook itself, however, and became a boy again.

After they had been home for awhile, the day of Sacrifice Feast⁵ arrived. Since sheep were then selling for high prices, the boy turned himself into a sheep. He said, "Grandmother, sell me for as high a price as possible, but do not let the buyer have my halter." The Arab [Of-f-f Jinn] came along and recognized at once the true nature of that sheep. He offered the old woman a good price for the sheep just as it was. She did not want to let him have the animal's halter, but he increased the price to 10,000 liras and got both the the sheep and its halter

The Arab took the sheep to his home, where he said to it, "You told me that you hadn't learned anything--didn't you?"

While the Arab was looking for his knife, his son said to the sheep, "How did you ever fall into my father's

⁵The four-day Sacrifice Feast (Kurban Bayramı in Turkish) begins on the fortieth day after the end of the holy month of Ramazan, during which Muslims fast every day between sunrise and sunset. For this religious feast many Muslims who can afford to do so purchase a sheep and slaughter it. Often the family that purchases such a sacrificial sheep eats only part of its flesh and then gives the remainder to the poor.

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hands again?" Before the Arab could return with a sharp knife, the sheep gored his son. He then turned himself into a bird and flew away. Discovering this, the Arab transformed himself into an eagle and pursued the bird. The bird flew to the padishah's palace and entered it through an open window. Once inside, he turned into a rose. When the padishah's daughter smelled its scent, she picked it up and placed it in her bosom.

When the Arab realized what had happened, he turned himself back into human shape and knocked on the palace door. When the door was opened, the Arab asked to speak to the padishah. After he had received permission to do that, he said to the ruler, "I had a special rose with which I was playing, but I dropped it in front of one of your windows. Your daughter came and took that rose, which she then placed in her bosom, saying, 'How wonderful this rose smells!' I should like to have my rose back.

The padishah went and spoke to his daughter about this, but she refused to give up the rose. But when the Arab entered the room, she removed the rose from her bosom and threw it down upon the carpet. Suddenly the entire floor of that room was covered with roses

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Arab turned into a chicken and began eating those roses. The boy then changed from a rose into a dog and proceeded to eat the chicken

After the boy had returned to human shape, he said to the ruler, "My padishah, did you observe what happened just now?"

The padishah had indeed seen the destruction of the Arab, and he had been very impressed by the ability of the young man. He gave his daughter in marriage to the old woman's grandson.